

Maintaining Immigration Status

What does “Maintaining Status” mean?

US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) requires that individuals who enter the US on an F-1 or J-1 visa follow specific rules related to their nonimmigrant status. If you follow these rules, you are considered to be “**in status**” or “**maintaining status**” and thus are allowed to stay in the US to study. The Office of International Education & Development (OIED) is required to report F-1/J-1 student immigration status to DHS using the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS).

If you do not follow these rules, your SEVIS record may be **terminated** and you would be considered to be “**out of status.**” In such cases, you would either have to leave the US or apply for **reinstatement** of your SEVIS record to US Customs and Immigration Services (USCIS). Reinstatement is only possible if the status violation was beyond the student’s control, such as in the event of a natural disaster, illness or injury, or closure of the school. If you work illegally, you WILL NOT be reinstated. Reinstatement is expensive, takes time, and may be denied.

Maintaining status is important and certain violations of status may possibly bar you from entering the US for 3 to 10 years.

How to Maintain Your Status at Western Oregon University:

1. Attend and enroll in classes at Western Oregon University.
 - Having an F-1 or J-1 visa allows you to come to the US to study and be a student.
2. Report to WOU at the beginning of every term by completing “immigration registration”.
 - This updates OIED records if your address, phone number or personal email changes.
 - This process helps students review the responsibilities related to their F-1 and J-1 status.
3. Maintain a full course of study each term (summer or vacation periods excluded).
 - Undergraduate students must enroll in at least **12 credits**.
 - Graduate students must enroll in at least **9 credits**.
 - Undergraduates need to register for **15-18 credits** each term to finish within 4 years.
4. Only **3 credits of online courses** can be counted toward the required 12/9 credits to maintain status. Regulations require that students are present at the WOU campus in Monmouth.
 - In other words, you must register for at least 9 credits of regular in class/on campus credits, then additional hours may be online and will count for maintaining status.
5. Get approval for a Reduced Course Load (RCL) BEFORE you withdraw from classes. You must get OIED approval before you drop a class. The reasons for taking an RCL are:
 - *English Difficulties or Improper Course Placement:* (May only request during the first term at WOU.)
 - *Medical Condition:* (Your doctor or psychologist will need to provide a written recommendation.)
 - *Last term before Graduation:* (You need less than 12/9 credits in order to graduate.)
 - *Finishing Thesis or Comprehensive Exam:* (If you major requires a thesis or exam to graduate.)
 - *Concurrent Enrollment:* (If the total number of credit between WOU and a concurrent university is 12/9 credits, you may study at WOU and at a different university.)
 - *Vacation Term:* (If you have been enrolled for an academic year, 3 terms in a row, you are eligible for a vacation). Talk to an International Student Advisor about taking a vacation term.

6. Make academic progress.
 - By maintaining a grade point average of 2.00 or above each term you will remain in Good Academic Standing. If your Term or Total GPA falls below a 2.00, you will be on Academic Warning followed by Academic Probation and finally Academic Suspension.
 - If you are placed on Academic Suspension, you cannot enroll at WOU and must transfer to another school or apply for academic reinstatement.
7. Notify OIED before you leave the United States or leave WOU for any reason.
 - Tell OIED if you plan to do the following: travel outside the US, enroll in a study abroad program, withdraw from WOU, take a term off, transfer to another school, or graduate.
 - Keeping OIED informed will help you avoid unexpected problems with maintaining status.
8. Tell OIED before you start any kind of employment. You will need work authorization or permission from OIED before you can begin working. Understand the different types of employment:
 - *On-Campus Employment:* F-1/J-1 students may work on-campus in jobs that serve WOU students directly. Limited to 20 hours per week during terms, and 40 hours during breaks.
 - *Off-Campus Employment:* Student must gain work authorization from USCIS before they can begin working off campus. Only severe economic hardship situations are eligible.
 - *Curricular Practical Training (CPT):* Majors that require internships need to be approved by OIED. Work on CPT may be paid or unpaid.
 - *Optional Practical Training (OPT) for F-1:* Can be done part-time during the studies or full time after graduation, 12 months of full time work off campus related to students' major. USCIS work authorization required.
 - *Academic Training (AT) for J-1:* During or after the J-1 program is completed, work authorization may last up to 18 months. AT is full-time work related to the student's program of study.
 - *Volunteer Work:* Work that offers no pay or other benefits for the work performed. The position involves work that is normally unpaid in other contexts.
9. Keep the OIED office updated regarding the following changes: change of education level, change of major, or change of financial situation (scholarship, financial guarantee, etc).
10. Notify OIED within 10 days if your address changes (even if address is temporary). Keep your phone number and personal email updated.
11. Keep your immigration documents correct and up-to-date.
 - Check for any errors or outdated information on your I-20 or DS-2019, passport, visa and I-94 card. Makes copies of newly updated documents at the OIED office.
 - If your I-20 or DS-2019 program end date is approaching, contact OIED to extend it at least 60 days before it ends. Renew your passport 6 months before it expires.
12. Check your wou.edu email at least once every day for important information.

Notify the Office of International Education & Development of any circumstances that may impact your status. OIED IS HERE TO OFFER ADVICE AND SUPPORT.